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SENSITIVE
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KABUL FOR COS USFOR-A
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TAGS: [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [AF](#)
SUBJECT: COMMUNITY SUPPORT CHARACTERIZES PHASE 3 VOTER
REGISTRATION SUCCESS

REF: A. KABUL 08 3215
[1](#)B. KABUL 08 3296
[1](#)C. KABUL 0029
[1](#)D. KABUL 08 2939
[1](#)E. KABUL 08 3190

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[1](#)1. Phase 3 voter registration ended January 13, with three sites that closed for the Ashura (Muharram) holiday adding back a day on January 14. As of January 15, Independent Election Commission (IEC) data show some 910,471 new voters joined the rolls in Nangarhar, Laghman, Khost, Paktika, Zabul, and Farah provinces. Operations proceeded smoothly and the IEC moved quickly to resolve the most common complaint -- that the batteries for the cameras and the car batteries used for power failed to perform reliably.

SECURITY CHALLENGES MET

[1](#)2. (SBU) IEC Deputy Chief Technical Officer Zekria Barakzai in several recent meetings has emphasized the key role that popular support has played in overcoming the security challenges of voter registration in the Phase 3 provinces. Afghan National Police Major General Rozi on January 10 seconded this analysis, saying ordinary Afghans have kept the Taliban from "meddling" in the process. Rozi added that, in his view, this strong show of popular commitment to elections portends calm on voting day.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Community leaders intervened to secure the release without ransom of registration workers kidnapped in Farah and Paktika (REF A.) A second worker kidnapped in Paktika has yet to be released. The voter registration site at the Mandozai district center in Khost re-opened the day after a suicide bomber killed fourteen children attending a school awards ceremony there. The bomber's exact intentions are unknown, but many locals believe the students, not local government officials or voter activity, were the target (REF B.) As reported REF A, the Taliban fired rockets which landed near a voter registration site in Kanesk district in Farah; the target was almost certainly not the site, but nearby Afghan soldiers. In one incident in Paktika and one in Khost, thieves stole voter registration materials.

WORRY OVER ETHNIC DISPARITIES EASES

14. (SBU) IEC senior technical officials assess that the Phase 3 turnout has addressed earlier doubts about Pashtun voter participation in the elections. Substantial registration in the populous, largely Pashtun province of Nangarhar (REF C), in particular, means that perceptions of ethnic disparities are receding. In Phase 3, from January 10 data, Nangarhar, Khost, and Paktika added some 585,000 new voters. In the 2004 presidential contest, roughly 930,000 voters came from these three Pashtun-dominated provinces. The four Phase 4 provinces of Helmand, Kandahar, Nimroz, and Uruzgan, in comparison, contributed about one-third fewer voters -- just under 620,000 in 2004.

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION MODERATE

15. (SBU) The participation of women in the Phase 3 update is 39 per cent, within 1 percent of the rate in Phase 1 and Phase 2 (REF D.) The number of women registrants increased sharply in the last few days of the phase, a phenomenon also observed in earlier phases. The IEC reports its local conferences, held separately for women, religious leaders, and tribal elders, produced noticeable upticks in turnout, especially for women. With the exception of Zabul, female participation in voter registration in all Phase 3 provinces is higher than female participation in secondary school, which varies from 6 to 27 percent. (Excluding known irregularities, this comparative advantage for voter registration holds for 14 of the 24 provinces of Phase 1 and 2 as well.) In Zabul, the Provincial Electoral Officer refused to follow his colleagues' example of substituting elders when women registration workers could not be found. This poor management limited female participation to a mere 5 percent.

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16. (SBU) FEFA, the Afghan NGO monitoring the voter registration process, noted the proxy registration of women observed in Phase 2 (REF E) continued in Phase 3, but did not collect data on the scope of the problem. FEFA deployed 136 observers covering about 70 per cent of the Phase 3 sites. In Khost, women were 51 per cent of total new registrants, a rate high enough to suggest some irregularities may be present.

WOOD